

PRESS RELEASE

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ARIZONA HAS RECEIVED OVER 3.4 MILLION DOLLARS THROUGH PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS TO PROSECUTE AND REDUCE GUN CRIME IN ARIZONA

United States Attorney for the District of Arizona Announces Local Gun Prosecution Strategy

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- Paul K. Charlton, the United States Attorney for the District of Arizona, applauds the efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and Arizona Firearms Safety Coalition, a community outreach partner who are working together through Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) to prevent and prosecute gun crime. Active PSN partners include: the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement; United States Marshal's Office; United States Probation Office; Drug Enforcement Administration; Arizona Attorney General's Office; Arizona Departments of Public Safety and Corrections; County Sheriffs' Offices; County Attorneys' Offices; Phoenix City Attorney's Office; and many local police departments.

"The local strategy involves employing prosecutors who specialize in the prosecution of gun cases to handle a designated PSN caseload which targets armed felons, repeat offenders, and those individuals who

(MORE)

have a prior history of violence or gang membership,” said United States Attorney Charlton.

National Scope, Local Impact. PSN was launched in 2001 by President George W. Bush. The Bush Administration committed \$901 million to Project Safe Neighborhoods during the next three years. While national in scope, each community’s PSN task force is working to design and implement a local approach to combat the unique criminal circumstances that the area faces. “Under President Bush’s leadership, Project Safe Neighborhoods is making a tremendous difference in ensuring that gun crime equals hard time,” said Charlton.

A Record of Increased Prosecutions Locally. As a result of the PSN initiative, the volume and consistency of firearms cases referred to the United States Attorney’s Office in Arizona is on the rise. With several prosecutors focused primarily on firearms cases, a continued increase in prosecutions and convictions is expected. The number of federal gun prosecutions has nearly doubled in the District of Arizona from 156 in 1998, to 302 in 2003. “Gun prosecutions of the most dangerous and violent offenders are a priority in Arizona,” said United States Attorney Charlton. Since October of 2003 to the present, 49 gun cases have been indicted in the Phoenix Office.

A Record of Increased Prosecutions Nationally. In FY 2002 and FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased nearly 24 percent nationally, and since FY 2000, there has been a 62 percent increase in defendants charged with firearm-related crimes nationally. Project Safe Neighborhoods first set a record in FY 2002 for increasing the number of defendants charged with gun-related crimes by 20 percent. During this year, Project Safe Neighborhoods set a new Justice Department record with nearly 23 percent more defendants charged with gun crimes. Federal offenders are being sentenced to significant jail time. In FY 2003, 93 percent of defendants were sentenced to some prison time, and about 72 percent of offenders were sentenced to prison terms greater than three years.

Local Grants. Since September 2001, Arizona has received more than 3.4 million

(MORE)

dollars in grants to fund the local PSN strategy. Over 2 million dollars has been designated for employment of 18 PSN prosecutors throughout the state of Arizona. In 2003, a total of over \$970,000.00 was allocated to the state of Arizona for PSN. Out of the \$970,000, \$563,000.00 was awarded for specialized grants through the Project Safe Neighborhoods Executive Council to supplement the crime mapping program for local police departments, Juvenile Education Programs, Forensic Firearms Testing, Gun Intelligence Support, the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), and the ADAM project which will collect data pertaining to gangs and guns throughout the state. Additionally, there is currently available over \$300,000 in PSN grant funds for Juvenile Education Programs, Gun Intelligence Support, Major Firearms Case Support, and Forensic Firearm Testing. For additional information regarding eligibility and acquisition of grant solicitations, call Carla Friestad, Law Enforcement Coordinator for the United States Attorney's Office, at (602)514-7573.

PSN Media Campaign Illustrates Realities Of Gun Crimes, Promotes Gun Safety. Arizona Safety Firearm Coalition (ASFC) and the United States Attorney's Office (USAO) today launch a media campaign to increase public awareness for the tragic effects gun violence has on Arizona families and communities. Through ***Gun Crime Hits Home***, victims of gun violence tell the devastating toll firearm violence has taken on their lives and the impact it can have on their families. The campaign consists of television and radio commercials, bus shelter posters, informational brochures and a Web Site www.BeSafeAZ.com. "We also want to raise awareness for safe gun ownership and encourage people to use gun locks or home safes to keep firearms out of the wrong hands," said Arizona Firearm Safety Coalition (AFSC) chairman Joseph T. Zerella, M.D. For more information about AZPSN and AFSC, contact Dr. Zerella at (602)944-0218.

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Recent Successful Federal Prosecutions. Mark Louis Sandon (DOB 11-5-54), of Phoenix, Arizona, was sentenced on August 27, 2003, to 17 ½ years in prison for Felon in Possession of Firearm in violation of Armed Career Criminal Act. Sandon is a member of Aryan Brotherhood and had 10 prior felony convictions.

William Thomas White (DOB 1-16-1955), of Phoenix, Arizona was sentenced to 10 years in prison on March 11, 2003. White was attempting to redeem a firearm from a licensed pawn shop and was stymied by a Brady background check. White had 16 prior felony offenses.

Ernesto David Valencia (DOB July 12, 1970), of Phoenix, Arizona was sentenced to 5 years in prison on June 12, 2003. Valencia was caught committing a burglary of a family member's residence while his family was attending a funeral. Valencia had two prior felony convictions involving armed robbery and sexual assault of a 72 year old woman.

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